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ABSTRACT

Beginning in the year 1568, American Indians were thrust into an alien educational environment in which their languages--the very expressions of their tribal cultures--had no relevance or validity from the perspective of their teachers. The evolution of educational policy as it has affected Indians was initially tied to land transfer and acquisition, and it has been consistently assimilative in its orientation. The church, the federal government, and the schools could not and would not allow Indians to remain Indians. These three most powerful institutions in the United States all tried to change Indians, and they exerted intense pressure aimed at suppressing Indian cultures and Indian languages. The failure of the United States to educate Indian children continued until 1972 when Congress enacted the Indian Education Act specifically to meet the unique educational needs of American Indians at all levels of education. Indian involvement is a legislative mandate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all Indian education programs funded under the Act. This is also a key provision of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. Indian involvement and self-determination have characterized federally funded education programs since the 1970s. (JHZ)

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Historical Review of Indian Education

Cultural Policies United States Position
IX Inter-American Indian Congress
Santa Fe, New Mexico
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"The Woman Who Comes To Offer Prayer"
Cheyenne

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The people of the sacred red earth are the indigenous population of the United States of America. Today, the world knows them as American Indians, a permanent misnomer, given them in 1492 by Christopher Columbus, who was 6,000 miles off course when he blundered into the waters off the Bahamas. American Indians know themselves by different names, most of which translate into an approximate form of "the people." According to many tribal specific genesis accounts, the Creator placed Indians in North America and they, consequently, believe they have lived on this earth island since the beginning of time.

Some scholars have taken exception to such Indian beliefs. They variously argue that American Indians migrated across the Bering Straits or that they drifted into the Western Hemisphere when a once single massive continent fragmented. Others further contend that Indians are the remnants of people from the lost, advanced civilizations of Atlantis or Lemuria, or that they, indeed, are the Lost Tribes of Israel. Some others have theorized that Indians are the descendants of people who came to earth far from their homes in outer space to which they long ago returned.

Suffice it to say that such theories and American Indian genesis accounts stand in stark contrast with each other, for Indians perceive the United States of America to be their ancient homeland. Regardless of what measure of time the dominant society might utilize, American Indians have lived in North America thousands upon thousands of years longer than the five hundred years Indians have coexisted with Anglo-Europeans.

Their lengthy land tenure in America truly

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makes them a unique people. Over time, American Indians evolved their diverse and tribally unique ways of life with their varying world views, philosophies, spiritual belief systems, and languages. Their very diversity makes them strong and their sophisticated principles of survival have provided them with a resilience that continues to ensure their existence into this century despite nearly five hundred years of Anglo attempts to exterminate them and to assimilate them by removing every vestige of their Indian-ness.

Following Indian-white contact, the new Americans established their institutions, the three most powerful of which have been used to assimilate and change American Indians. They are the church, the United States government, and the nation's educational systems. It is ironic that a country that constitutionally mandates a separation of church and state, historically has provided funds to religious denominations to educate Indian children. This practice continued to the turn of the twentieth century, which resulted in the first three hundred years of Indian education being under the control of the church.

Following the establishment of the United States government, pursuant to President Ulysses S. Grant's Peace Policy, the government created federally-subsidized church group schools by providing funds to religious groups to operate Indian schools. The primary goal of such schools, obviously, was to convert Indians to Christianity. Since the missionaries were at liberty to design their curriculum, they heavily emphasized religious instruction. They actually devoted but a small period of the day to academics, during which time Indian children learned basic arithmetic and learned to speak, read and write English.

The major part of the school day, however, was spent in industrial training, currently referred to as vocational education. Indian students engaged in manual labor and performed tasks ranging from working out in the fields or in the dairy, to working in the kitchen or housing facilities. The students essentially were nothing more than child laborers and their usual day was sixteen hours in length. Succinctly, the basic curriculum of these schools consisted of the three areas of religious instruction, academics, and industrial training, all of which were designed to assimilate Indians and to change them into Christian yeomen farmers and domestics or housewives.

These early schools set the precedent in Indian education. A review of Indian policy and the history of Indian education discloses that they were inextricably interwoven, reflecting the United States land posture. In the initial stages of Indian education, the government established federally-subsidized church group schools in response to the federal Indian policy of treaty-making.

In terms of policy between 1789 and 1871, treaty-making was the means whereby the newly established United States government dealt with the indigenous people. Among other provisions, the standard article in most Indian treaties specified that the government agreed to provide a school and a teacher for every thirty Indian children for a minimum specified period of time only, usually with no date for terminating such services. The various Indian tribes in return agreed to certain land cessions.

Late in the nineteenth century the public began to question the constitutionality of providing federal subsidies to religious groups for Indian education. By then the government already had shifted to the reservation policy, which was in effect between 1871 and 1887. The government intended to confine Indians to reservations, thereby making ever more land available for white settlement. Although it was more directly involved in Indian education, the government continued to grant permission to religious groups to operate mission schools on reservations.

The curriculum of reservation boarding schools was identical to that of the earlier federally-subsidized church group schools. It was still the goal to assimilate Indians and change them by educating, Christianizing, and "civilizing" them. The government stressed an English education and native languages were subjected to more intense pressure than previously had occurred. Children were punished severely for speaking their tribal languages in the school environment and there was absolutely no acknowledgement of the linguistic and cultural variances of Indian students.

The United States assumed a position of ethnocentic arrogance in regard to Indian education which it continued to maintain in both its on and off reservation boarding school systems. Off reservation boarding schools came into existence in 1879 when Richard Henry Pratt established Carlisle Indian Industrial Training School in Pennsylvania. The blatant assimilationist goals of such schools were re-

flected in the passage of the Dawes Severalty Act in 1887, which further eroded the Indian land base through the allotment process. This breaking up of reservations was directly parallel to the breaking up of tribes, families, and identities of Indian students. Philosophically, removal to an alien environment was expected to result in assimilation.

The curriculum, identical to that of the two earlier systems, was dedicated to "civilizing" its students. Pratt compared himself to a Baptist in that he believed in totally immersing his students into "civilization." In too many instances, however, such schools produced marginal individuals who had not been prepared adequately to exist as Indians or in white society. Pratt and his colleagues often lamented the fact that a significant number of their students "returned to the blanket" so to speak.

By the turn of the twentieth century, there were twenty-five such schools located in Nebraska, Oregon, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico, and California, to cite a few, most of which were located near urban areas. Such intensity of educational purpose oriented toward change, which was a by-product of "Manifest Destiny," eventually began to have an adverse effect upon Indian cultural and language maintenance.

In the 1920's the federal government came under intense public criticism concerning its management of Indian affairs, which resulted in a comprehensive socio-economic study of American Indians and of the federal programs that affected them. Working through the Brookings Institution, then called the Institute for Government Research, Lewis Meriam was placed in charge of a review team which conducted a two year survey. Meriam and his team issued their report in 1928 titled *The Problem of Indian Administration*. While all aspects of federal administration were determined to be a failure of major proportions, the review team documented a poor quality of federal services, particularly in the areas of health and education.

The Meriam survey team was highly critical of the federal boarding school system. Among many findings, they condemned the practice of separating Indian children from their families and placing the children in boarding schools. They further condemned what they referred to as an unrealistic instructional curriculum. The survey team recommended that the federal government institute more relevant curriculum that recognized the cultural and language variances of Indian children. They also called for Indian community involvement in the direction of Indian education programs.

Fundamentally, the Meriam report called for a change in the point of view of federal administration. More specifically, Indian education policy had to be developed consistent with sound educational practices rather than as a parallel to federal Indian land policy.

Five years later in 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed John Collier as his Commissioner of Indian Affairs. In his initial Commissioner's report, Collier made a commitment to implementing some of the recommendations from the Meriam report. Equally significant was the fact that he was knowledgeable about American Indians, that he respected their basic human rights, and that he advocated cultural maintenance.

Largely as a result of his efforts, in 1934 the Congress passed the Johnson-O'Malley Act into law, which formalized state involvement in Indian education. It was the first piece of federal legislation directed solely to American Indian education and it authorized the Secretary of the Interior to contract with the various states for the education of Indian children. Funds provided through Johnson-O'Malley were to be used to meet the special and unique needs of Indian children not otherwise provided for by the public school system. The act was amended in 1936, which expanded contracting authority to educational institutions and other appropriate agencies.

During his administration, Collier encouraged and supported the development of academically sound and comprehensive Indian education programs, which were designed primarily for children, but which included adult education, as well. He is credited with initiating many innovative and necessary educational programs, significant among which were bilingual education and coursework in Indian culture. In addition, sixteen boarding schools were closed and replaced by eighty-four day schools during the twelve years Collier served as the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Without question, Collier exerted an exceptionally positive influence upon Indian education. With the advent of World War II, however, the direction of Indian education reverted to that of pre-Meriam administrations. Concerted assimilation attempts intensified and were re-

flected in the Bureau of Indian Affairs relocation policy, House Concurrent Resolution 108 calling for termination of Indian tribes, and federal legislation authorizing concurrent jurisdiction by the federal government, tribe(s), and the state over law enforcement on reservations.

The "melting pot" philosophy permeated the nation's classrooms as well. It was evident in the unicultural orientation of the public school curriculum. Indians criticized public schools for their failure to incorporate culturally relevant material into the curriculum and the denigration of native languages, apparent by their very absence.

The nation was oblivious to multilingual and multicultural education, which was rectified in part by the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. It was a means of providing an effective education for all of the nation's disadvantaged youth. Title I of the act was amended in 1966 to include the Bureau of Indian Affairs in order to extend equal educational opportunity to Indian children, the most disadvantaged of all. Funding was primarily for program development and to generate research that would improve the quality of education for all disadvantaged youth. The most significant aspect of this act was Title VII, which was directed to bilingual education.

Through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the United States had acknowledged its linguistic and cultural diversity and the advantage it heretofore had provided to children from the American mainstream. Education was becoming more responsive to social reality, which necessitated not only action but assessment, as well. Consequently, in the late 1960's, the United States Senate called for a study of Indian education.

The failure of the United States to educate Indian children was again documented in the findings of the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, chaired by Edward M. Kennedy. His subcommittee investigated public schools, federal schools, and parochial schools. Issued in 1969, the report was a forty year echo of the Meriam report. The socio-economic conditions of Indians had not improved perceptibly and neither had education. The findings of the Kennedy subcommittee were shocking in terms of low educational achievement levels, high dropout rates, and negative self-concepts of Indian students. The report was aptly titled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy — A National Challenge*.

Congress subsequently acknowledged the tragedy and accepted the challenge. It enacted the Indian Education Act (Title IV of Public Law 92-318, Education Amendments of 1972) specifically to meet the unique educational needs of American Indians at all levels of education. It created an Office of Indian Education, established a National Advisory Council on Indian Education, provided funding to local education agencies, awards grants for special projects for both children and adults, and makes fellowship awards for graduate study in the critical professions.

Title IV is significant in that Indian involvement is a legislative mandate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all Indian education programs funded under Title IV. This also is a key provision in Public Law 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. Contracting requires maximum Indian community participation in Indian education programs and other federal programs and services funded under Public Law 93-638. This law also amended the Johnson-O'Malley Act, stipulating Indian parental/community involvement in its educational programs.

Beginning in the early 1970's, Indian involvement and self-determination have characterized federally funded education programs, a fact further recognized in the passage of the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978. This act was amended in 1979 to increase appropriations for technical assistance grants to Indian community colleges, which continued funding so they could develop their institutional capabilities, specifically in regard to accreditation.

Approximately one hundred institutions of higher education across the nation offer Indian Studies. Many of them teach Indian languages and through their curriculum reenforce the unique cultural heritage and experiences of Indian students. Some such institutions accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education must comply with the Multicultural Education standard adopted in 1979. As a requisite to accreditation, they must provide instruction in multi-cultural education in their teacher education programs.

The terms multicultural (bicultural) and bilingual (multi-lingual) education are concepts that actually have had little application in the average public school classroom. Begin-

ning in the year 1568, American Indians were thrust into an alien educational environment in which their languages, the very expressions of their tribal respective cultures, had no relevance or validity from the perspective of their teachers.

The evolution of educational policy as it has affected Indians initially was tied to land transfer and acquisition and it has been consistently assimilative in its orientation. The church, the federal government, and the schools could not and would not allow Indians to remain Indians. These three most powerful institutions in the United States all tried to change Indians and they exerted intense pressure aimed at suppressing Indian culture(s) and Indian languages.

The states were no more educationally successful than their predecessors until the 1970's was again accorded to Indians. Re-determination is a more appropriate term inasmuch as they had evolved their tribal specific cultures, spoke complex languages, and instituted culturally relevant means for educating their youth in precontact times. Furthermore, they traditionally lived in a culturally pluralistic society in that they were multitribal. They had no reason to question their origins as a people. They were an intensely spiritual people who had been created from the sacred red earth of this their homeland. They are the indigenous people of the United States of America.